



Join our free membership site, The Duke Humfrey's, and get access to full transcripts, past episodes, exclusive downloads and more. You'll find it all at [www.MBS.works/podcast](http://www.MBS.works/podcast)

MBS ([00:00](#)):

It's a little over six weeks until my new book comes out in the world, How To Work with (Almost) Anyone. June 27th, 2023. In case you are wondering, but I'm already selling it right here, right now. I'm selling it online, selling it on a website, [bestpossiblereationship.com](http://bestpossiblereationship.com), and selling it not hard exactly, but persistently. You can see what I'm doing. This is how I'm brilliantly, cunningly weaving it into an introduction to a podcast. I'll tell you why. Because pre-order is a thing, and it's not a small thing. You can use it the way I'm doing it now, which is to try and help get the flywheel spinning so when the book does become available, it arrives on a rocket, boom, it's there. All those pent-up sales help the book jump up the charts and perhaps land on the bestseller list.

([00:53](#)):

I don't really mind about the bestseller list. I do care about getting the algorithms getting excited about the book. I heard James Clear, famous for



Atomic Habits, say that publishing was a power-log game. I'm not totally sure what power log means, but I think it means that the difference between the top 1% and the top 0.1% is massive. The difference between the top 1% and the top 10% is massive. It's that long-tail theory. If you can be at the head of the long tail, you're selling a lot of books, so it matters. It really matters if you can get beyond the noise of all the books that come out in the world and get established as a classic, as an important book, and that pre-order helps you do that. Bestsellers keep on being bestsellers. Escaping the gravity of indifference really matters.

[\(01:47\):](#)

But the other way, and by the way, there's a connection to this, to my guest, so hang in there. The other way to use pre-orders is to remove risk in the creating of something. If we know anything about marketing, build it, and they will come as a load of old bollocks. It's an out-and-out lie. It just doesn't work like that. But inviting people in to express their support for a project in the making can give you the cash, the resources, or the confidence to take the leap. It's market research together, often with cash, money, liquidity. In other words, this is for all of us, not just for people like me writing books. Invite people in early and ask them for their support. Yes, thank you. I'm doing that here. I'm going to get onto the interview in a nanosecond, but you can pre-order my book at [bestpossiblerelationship.com](http://bestpossiblerelationship.com). There are some pretty great pre-order bonuses there if you snag those before June 27th.

[\(02:54\):](#)

Now, welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from their favorite book, a book that has moved them, book that has shaped them. Ash Ambirge is a woman whose newsletter I signed up for and I actually read because she has such a distinctive, opinionated, and fearless voice. She's one of the original pioneers of the creator economy. She's been on the road since 2009, and she writes newsletters and books about the modern digital nomad experience and economy, about remote work, and about



using creativity and technology to do what you love from wherever you are. Now, you'll hear in the conversation that Ash is vibrant, funny, loud, and distinctive in real life, just as she is when she's writing her newsletters. But if you met her when she was 14, when she lived in a trailer park with her mom, you'd have met someone using a very different strategy from making her way through life.

Ash ([03:56](#)):

For me, the only form of safety, I think, that I found was being able to not zag, fit in, do as everyone else was doing so they wouldn't notice that in some way I was less than or that I had a defect. Something was wrong with me. I did everything I could painstakingly to just look as if I had grown up in a two-story house with a golden retriever, I had carpeted staircase, and lemon pepper chicken, which, to me, was the holy grail.

MBS ([04:32](#)):

Ash spent her early years making herself small, living a life that didn't attract too much of the wrong kind of attention. She got by through school and eventually college, but then things started to change.

Ash ([04:45](#)):

Once I graduated college and my mom passed away, there was just no one to tell me what the rules were anymore. I had no one that was close to me judging me in any meaningful way. I think a lot of us struggle with this feeling of pressure from parents and loved ones to be a doctor or whatever. I had none of that pressure.

MBS ([05:09](#)):

Without rules, without boundaries, without pressure, Ash started to question how she wanted to show up in the world, who she was now and who she might be, what she really, really wanted.



Ash ([05:22](#)):

You get to the adult moment when you're finally driving a car that's cool, you've got a suit on, and you're going to work, and you're like, "Oh my goodness, I spent my entire life for this. This is what I'm doing." And that was my first moment where I started to see myself really rebel. It happened in a lot of ways, particularly with my career. I think the Middle Finger Project was a fitting name for me at the time.

MBS ([05:48](#)):

In Ash's word, the Middle Finger Project is about beating the out of imposter syndrome. She began to write her own rules, and those rules began with a simple and excruciatingly hard question.

Ash ([06:00](#)):

There came a moment in time when as I was questioning, "What are the things that we need to do in order to do work that makes us proud and live a life that makes us happy?"

MBS ([06:13](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([06:13](#)):

This was a very present question for me since I didn't have anyone telling me what to do,-

MBS ([06:18](#)):

Right.

Ash ([06:18](#)):

... and I started acting almost like an anthropologist, which was my career of choice when I was younger, and I started studying other cultures.



MBS ([06:29](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([06:30](#)):

I thought if everyone else in the world has come up with 101 different languages, maybe they've come up with 101 different ways to be happy. I started looking at different cultures, subcultures, going almost as a participant observer, and going salsa dancing and to different restaurants that I would normally never go to try and find these answers, and that put me in some really interesting situations. I met a lot of really interesting people, many of which just didn't have the same societal programming that we did.

MBS ([07:04](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([07:07](#)):

I viewed, for example, a guy who was making maybe \$10 an hour delivering frozen foods and who did not have aspirations beyond that as something refreshing. I wanted to study it. Why don't you have the pressure,-

MBS ([07:29](#)):

Right.

Ash ([07:29](#)):

... and why are you content with this?

MBS ([07:32](#)):

My contentment.



Ash ([07:33](#)):

It was, and he went to the gym every day. He didn't drink alcohol. He was just very content, and there was something that really made me very curious about that. I kept going down the rabbit hole of, "What are all these other people doing?"

MBS ([07:48](#)):

Yes.

Ash ([07:48](#)):

I started experimenting with my own career. I was very flippant about it, and I didn't have a backup plan. Maybe in spite of not having a backup plan, I was more belligerent about the whole thing, decided to start freelancing, did not manage money well. Ended up as a self-fulfilling prophecy one night, finding myself sleeping in my car in a Kmart parking lot,-

MBS ([08:11](#)):

Right.

Ash ([08:13](#)):

... and that's the moment that I recall distinctly what had happened that night, I've got 26 bucks to my name. I now do not have a traditional role at a company. Even if I were to find a traditional role at a company tomorrow, it's going to be a month until they get me into the pay system, and I'm going, what does a person do? I don't have anything to sell. I don't have jewels.

MBS ([08:37](#)):

You didn't have a stash of jewels on the back of the car?

Ash ([08:42](#)):

Sometimes I have them, but they weren't on hand that day,-



MBS ([08:43](#)):

All right.

Ash ([08:46](#)):

... and that's really when I remember it, like yesterday. I'm sitting there in tears, and the radio announcer is this bumbling moron, and I hate him and I want to turn him off. Then he said something that changed the course of my life forever. This guy goes, the new Rihanna album is now available for pre-order.

MBS ([09:11](#)):

Okay, that's not what I thought you were going to say.

Ash ([09:15](#)):

Did you have a guess?

MBS ([09:17](#)):

I wasn't sure what it was going to be, but it was some chord or something, but not, here's a way of getting the new Rihanna album. What was it about that that struck a chord in your soul?

Ash ([09:28](#)):

As soon as I heard the word pre-order, it clicked. I thought to myself, "Oh my goodness, maybe I don't have to have property in the traditional sense, but maybe I could sell my ideas." An idea is something that publishers have been selling for eons.

MBS ([09:46](#)):

Yeah.



Ash ([09:47](#)):

They've packaged ideas into a saleable format, and all of a sudden it just clicked. I had already started writing a little bit online, and that very night was when I put out an announcement that said something along the lines of, "Now presenting my new project."

MBS ([10:07](#)):

Right.

Ash ([10:07](#)):

It was an opportunity to pre-order a book that I hadn't written yet, and it works. I think I made \$2,000 that first night,-

MBS ([10:16](#)):

Brilliant.

Ash ([10:16](#)):

... or week, or so, and it changed the course of my life forever. That was really the moment when I said, "You know what? This is what we're doing."

MBS ([10:25](#)):

Speaking of changing courses, you've shifted the language you used to talk about your work from the Middle Finger Project to the Selfish Forever. I'm just wondering what that change of framing, branding, or positioning symbolize. What's that telling us about you?

Ash ([10:45](#)):

Thank you for bringing that up, because it was a very difficult decision for anyone who has a personal brand. For me, I grew up with that identity.





MBS ([10:58](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([10:59](#)):

It did really see me through all of my 20s and a good portion of my 30s. I'm 38 now, and at some point it stopped being something I was excited to say out loud.

MBS ([11:10](#)):

Right.

Ash ([11:11](#)):

I no longer felt like it accurately represented my goals, my message, what I was talking about. It felt a little angry.

MBS ([11:20](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([11:21](#)):

It no longer felt like me. The moment I realized I did not want to get on an interview, let's say, and be like, "Hey, I'm the Middle Finger Project girl." That's when I knew something had to change.

MBS ([11:32](#)):

Right. With the shift away from the anger that's implied in the more overt rebellion that's implied in the Middle Finger Project, what is it about Selfish Forever that has resonance for you now? Why is that powerful?



Ash ([11:51](#)):

When I was doing all of my brainstorming, I kept doing this thing in my journal every morning like a real creep. I would just answer one question every day, and the question was, "What do I really want?"

MBS ([12:06](#)):

Right. Great question.

Ash ([12:07](#)):

It's a simple question. It's harder to answer than it seems, isn't it?

MBS ([12:10](#)):

Really hard.

Ash ([12:12](#)):

What do I really want? Not what my audience wants, not what I think would be marketable. What do I really want?

MBS ([12:21](#)):

Yep.

Ash ([12:22](#)):

I kept coming back to the same answer, and it was simple. I want to travel the world and be selfish forever.

MBS ([12:29](#)):

Nice.

Ash ([12:31](#)):

I rejected this idea that, as women in particular, you were selfish if you weren't having babies. You were selfish if you weren't settling down. You were selfish if



you weren't doing all of the things. In a very big way, it's still quite contrarian, just in a little bit of a different manner.

MBS ([12:52](#)):

It's less rejecting the idea that you're selfish if dot, dot, dot. It's more about saying, "Yes, you're selfish, and that's fine." That's actually an orientation you can make towards your own life.

Ash ([13:04](#)):

It's really been resonating. We're doing Selfish School now, and everyone in there is like, "Yes, I want to be selfish. I need this more in my life." And I thought, "This was a good decision. It feels really good."

MBS ([13:15](#)):

I love what that says about permission. It's like this is how you give yourself permission to whatever that might mean for you.

Ash ([13:25](#)):

Yes, yes, yes, permission. We're doing things in a much more radically different way. Online business is awful. So much of the things that we've built here,-

MBS ([13:35](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([13:35](#)):

... it needs to go.

MBS ([13:36](#)):

Yeah.



Ash ([13:36](#)):

It needs to go, we're doing it differently.

MBS ([13:41](#)):

Let's talk about the book you've chosen for us, Ash. What have you chosen?

Ash ([13:47](#)):

When tasked with the idea to pick a book that really influenced me,-

MBS ([13:55](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([13:57](#)):

... I instantly knew which one I wanted to-

MBS ([13:59](#)):

Oh, that's cool.

Ash ([14:01](#)):

... select. I did. It's not something that I think would be expected because it's not your typical non-fiction, like a business book, but the book is called Tell Them Who I Am by an anthropologist named Elliot Liebow, and it's the lives of homeless women. I read it in college, senior year 2006, right in the overlapping time when my mom passed away in January of that year and I was graduating in May.

MBS ([14:33](#)):

Right.



Ash ([14:33](#)):

It was something that I was assigned to read right in those critical months. As soon as I started reading it, I saw this potential alternate reality presented. My mom, trailer park, severe social anxiety, couldn't come to a single one of my volleyball games ever. I was captain.

MBS ([14:56](#)):

Right.

Ash ([14:56](#)):

I played year-round. She couldn't physically make herself walk into a gymnasium because she did not know where she would sit,-

MBS ([15:04](#)):

Right.

Ash ([15:05](#)):

... subsisting on government assistance. There was a lot. So growing up as a single, only child, I had to figure out what life was going to look like, and when I read this book, I thought, "Oh my gosh."

MBS ([15:20](#)):

Right.

Ash ([15:21](#)):

This is fascinating because I feel like it was an alternate reality one step away.

MBS ([15:29](#)):

I can feel how thin the membrane between the life you were living and the life that you're seeing in those pages must have felt to you.



Ash ([15:39](#)):

It did. I was able to relate to it in a way that I shouldn't have been able to because I hadn't been faced in that situation until years later. There I am in a Kmart parking lot, going, "Is this going to be the moment that I have been maybe waiting for since college when this happens to me?"

MBS ([16:00](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([16:01](#)):

I selected the book. I selected the book for that reason, but also because what this book does is he went and lived in different shelters around the Washington, DC, area. This is dating back to 1993, still really relevant, and what he's talking about in this book is actually the real stories of real people who are in this situation. What you see is, it's so counter to the narrative that most of society would like to impress upon someone who's experiencing homelessness. It's a completely different perspective, and I thought it was just really important, integral reading for all of us who are struggling to figure out what we want to do, who we want to be, and the question always comes up of like, "What if I fail?" I don't want to be on the street, for example. It ties into my work in a different way because, really, I wonder how much of this is preventable with modern technology. The ability to share your ideas, sell your ideas, it's not as cut and dry as it used to be.

MBS ([17:17](#)):

I love that. It goes back to your story about pre-order. Pre-order this. Allow me to give me the space, the money, and the time to create this thing and create some form of economic independence as part of that. Ash, I love that you've chosen this book, and I'm excited to hear the two pages you picked for us. How did you pick the two pages?



Ash ([17:39](#)):

Actually, I cheated.

MBS ([17:39](#)):

Great. Perfect.

Ash ([17:42](#)):

I cheated a little. I hope you're okay with that.

MBS ([17:44](#)):

You've still got the middle finger project going on here. I can feel it running underneath, but that's okay. The two pages is a rule made to be broken if you want to break it, so that's great. How did you cheat?

Ash ([17:58](#)):

What I did is I went through and I reread the book, and I selected some really relevant highlights that I think work well together in a-

MBS ([18:05](#)):

Perfect.

Ash ([18:06](#)):

... sequence of really just talking about what it's actually like to experience that.

MBS ([18:11](#)):

That's brilliant. Ash, over to you. I'm excited to hear your pages.

Ash ([18:23](#)):

Homelessness can transform what for others are little things into insurmountable hurdles. Indeed, homelessness in general puts a premium on little things, just as some homeless women seem to have learned more than



most of us perhaps, to value a small gesture of friendship, a nice day, a bus token, or a little courtesy that others might take for granted or not notice at all. So too, can events or circumstances that would be trivial irritants to others approach catastrophic proportions for the homeless person? For some of the women, day-to-day hardships began with the problem of getting enough sleep. A few women complained that they could never get any sleep in a shelter. Grace was one of them. "There's no getting any sleep in a shelter." She said, "Only rest." There was indeed much night noise and movement. There was snoring, coughing, sneezing, wheezing, retching, farting, cries from bad dreams, occasional weeping seizures, talking aloud to one cell or to someone else who may or may not have been present, and always movement back and forth to the bathroom.

[\(19:37\)](#):

Grace was complaining about noise, and she found a partial remedy in earplugs, but earplugs could not help those women like Kathleen, who were kept awake not by noise but by questions. Is this it for me? How did I end up here, and how will I get out? Having to get up at 5:30 in the morning and be out of the shelter by 7:00 was a major hardship of shelter life. It was not simply the fact of having to get up and out, but rather that the women had to do this every day of the week, every day of the year, no matter what the weather or how they felt. On any given morning, as the women drifted onto the street, one might see two or three ailing women, this one with a fever, this one with a cough, a headache, a limp, a stomach ache, still have to pick up their bags and walk silently into the weather.

[\(20:27\)](#):

The women especially missed Saturdays and Sundays, which looks just like Tuesday and Wednesday morning. For them, the occasional opportunity to stay in bed an extra hour or two was desperately missed. Not being able to sleep in ever, especially on the weekend, was seen by many as a major deprivation that unfairly set them apart from the rest of the world. It's all too easy to think of





homeless people as having few or no possessions, but one of the major and most talked-about problems was storage. How to keep one's clothing, essential documents, and other belongings secure and accessible. The preservation and protection of belongings could be a major consumer of one's time, energy, and resources. A principle difficulty was the fact that most emergency shelters had only limited space for individual storage, often space for only two bags or two small cardboard boxes. It was not uncommon to find shelters where one could not store anything at all.

[\(21:28\)](#):

Even where limited storage space was available, many women were reluctant to use it because there was no guarantee that their belongings would be intact when they returned. Given the contents of their bags, boxes, and suitcases, it is not surprising that the women were fiercely protective and possessive of them, sometimes to the patronizing amusement of outsiders. The importance of clothing in toiletries is self-evident. Moreover, the women had to carry proof of their social existence with them. Without a home address, telephone number, or job as testimony to their existence, they needed their birth certificates and other documents to prove that they existed as legal persons with rights to assert and claims to make on society. Many other women, however, mainly recent arrivals to homelessness or those with a car or other resources, often had far more belongings than they could carry or store in the shelters. These belongings were typically stored in their cars, public storage warehouses, a church basement, or even a garage or attic in the house of a friend or relative.

[\(22:33\)](#):

Most of the time, these non-portable possessions looked forward, not backward. These were the things that were being saved for the future, rather than remembrances of things past. Here, in the automobiles and the public and the private storage spaces, the women kept not only clothing but pots and pans, linens, silverware, lamps and chairs, hat boxes, electric typewriters, sometimes rugs, and other heavy major household furnishings as well. Sarah



regularly visited her storage unit to fondle her carefully wrapped crystal and linens. Clearly, the main value of these furnishings lay not in sentiment but in the hope, if not the prospect, that they would all be needed tomorrow, next week, or next month, when the woman once again set up housekeeping in her own place. Great sacrifices were made to store belongings, and the ever-present threat of losing them was a major source of anxiety and stress.

[\(23:34\)](#):

The smallest and cheapest spaces were 5 by 5 and rented for \$37.50 to \$42.50 a month, which meant that some of the women on public assistance spent about 25% of their income for storage alone. Others spent much more. During her first couple of homelessness, Louise paid \$156 a month to store her household goods. In addition to these general problems, there were hundreds of annoyances, some of which could indeed become serious problems, such as not having access to toilets when one needed them, especially on Sunday mornings and holidays when most public buildings and retail establishments were closed.

[\(24:13\)](#):

In bad weather, the women were often forced to spend time in eating places where they are not welcome, and they have to drink a lot more coffee and nibble on a lot more snacks than they wanted to or could afford just for the privilege of being able to stay out of the rain, cold, or heat. Sexual harassment was commonplace on the street, trying to sleep in one's car everywhere, and sometimes harassment became assault. These problems around sleeping, fatigue, storage, health, sex, harassment, and dozens of unpredictable difficulties encountered on the street were some of the little murders of everyday life that confronted homeless women.

[\(25:05\)](#):

I'll pause there.

MBS [\(25:06\)](#):



Yeah.

Ash ([25:06](#)):

I think that's a good two pages.

MBS ([25:08](#)):

It is. What's important for us to take away from what you've just read?

Ash ([25:17](#)):

What fascinated me about it was the idea that once you get to a certain place, you don't have a telephone number. You don't have easy access to a toilet, to a shower. You can't iron your clothes. You're automatically presumed to be like the dreads of society, even if you go to an interview, how difficult it is. The book stresses the actual difficulties that none of us see because a lot of the common narrative is like, "Just get a job." I saw my mom struggle with that.

MBS ([25:56](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([25:57](#)):

I saw these women in this book really struggle with this for a lot of different reasons, even though the anthropologist states that the large majority of them want jobs and they're out looking for them. But there's all of these hurdles that need to be addressed, and not having an email address, not having a phone is a biggie.

MBS ([26:18](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([26:18](#)):



Even if you get to the interview stage and you're there and you don't have a way to be contacted, that's not like, "Oh, hey, this is the shelter."

MBS ([26:25](#)):

Right.

Ash ([26:26](#)):

It presents a real systemic problem that I am so grateful I personally was able to overcome,-

MBS ([26:36](#)):

Yep.

Ash ([26:37](#)):

... but I wonder how many people are there because just these small little murders on everyday life,-

MBS ([26:43](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([26:43](#)):

... they cannot get around. It's fascinating. I think it's an important conversation.

MBS ([26:48](#)):

I think so too. There's a number of questions going through my head, and I'm just trying to think of which one I want to ask you.

Ash ([26:55](#)):

It's a big topic. That's a big topic.

MBS ([27:01](#)):



I think I'm curious to know, what does the experience of seeing your mom and reading this book, how does that influence you on how you manage your freedom?

Ash ([27:23](#)):

I like to take as many opportunities as I can because I am in a position to do so.

MBS ([27:31](#)):

Yep.

Ash ([27:35](#)):

I think about someone like my mom, who is just such an awesome person but so paralyzed by life, and I think about what would've changed for her had we had stuff like the internet back then. She was a great writer, and she loved gardening. She was obsessive with the garden. We may have lived in a trailer, but we had the nicest garden in town.

MBS ([28:06](#)):

Right.

Ash ([28:07](#)):

I wonder how life might have changed for her, because if society and social things were her problems, the internet would've solved that in a lot of ways. She could have maybe had a different reality for herself. So for me, I don't suffer from that. I'm happy to get on and talk and get on stage.

MBS ([28:28](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([28:28](#)):

I have no idea how I came out of her.



MBS ([28:29](#)):

I know.

Ash ([28:30](#)):

It doesn't make sense. Probably, I grew this ability stronger as a strength mechanism-

MBS ([28:37](#)):

For sure.

Ash ([28:38](#)):

... to prevent. But I think that all of us are, I'm going to say, obligated to do with what we can, with the gifts that we have, the ideas that we have. So many ideas never see light because the person who has the idea doesn't believe that the idea is worth it or that they're worth it. I think that this really is freedom. No one is stopping any of us from, right now, getting on, starting an all-new website dedicated to whatever you want in the entire world.

MBS ([29:22](#)):

Yep.

Ash ([29:24](#)):

I think that's important to remember. So much of it becomes like, "There's no jobs available." Or, "I'm having trouble here and there." And I really see freedom, the ultimate freedom, as being able to create your own art, your own ideas, and your own commerce.

MBS ([29:47](#)):

When people talk about freedom, there's two sides to it. There's freedom to, and that's what you're talking about at the moment. And there's freedom from,



and I'm curious to know, for you, what is freedom when you think about freedom from.

Ash ([30:03](#)):

That's a really good one. I want to answer you as honestly as I possibly can. I think I am quite free. The debilitating effect of feeling like I am an imposter every day, it's something I've had to work on for a long time, but I know that's a real prison. I think I've gained a lot of freedom from that over the years, just through trial and error, experimentation, and realizing that no matter what I do, I'm always going to feel that on some level.

MBS ([30:55](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([30:56](#)):

I just let it go.

MBS ([30:58](#)):

That's great.

Ash ([30:58](#)):

I'm just going to start Selfish Forever. I'm just going to do a new thing.

MBS ([31:01](#)):

I love it.

Ash ([31:02](#)):

I'm just going to do it. It's okay if you don't think that I'm qualified, because I'm going to prove to you that I am.



MBS ([31:12](#)):

Nice. Ash, we've been talking about your shift in identity, and also you have a lifestyle where you travel the world. You're a working nomad. How do you know when it's time to move on, whether that's from your sense of self or from your sense of place? How do you know when it's time to go?

Ash ([31:35](#)):

My biggest indicator is when I don't want to go outside anymore, and it happens. When I'm really in a new place, I'm thrilled. For a creative person, travel is a gold mine full of inspiration and ideas. I really love going and walking and looking at art and things to inspire me. The moment when I'm like, "Nah, I'd rather just stay inside all day and write in here." That's when I think it's time to move on.

MBS ([32:06](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([32:07](#)):

I've been feeling that in Costa Rica quite a bit.

MBS ([32:13](#)):

What does the idea of home or rooted mean to you?

Ash ([32:20](#)):

Funny enough, I've had my own storage unit since I graduated college. It is something that I laugh about with my literary agent, and I laugh about the storage unit because anytime I'm in the States, I'm taking a trip to the storage.

MBS ([32:36](#)):

Right.





Ash ([32:36](#)):

I have now two storage units in two different places. We laugh about that, but I think that a big part of my strategy now is to find a home base that I can start to establish a sense of roots. I did that in Philadelphia. I had a beautiful, really cool flat that I bought in a historic building. I loved it. I furnished the whole thing, and then I ended up selling it during the real estate boom.

MBS ([33:09](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([33:10](#)):

But I liked that feeling. It did feel like I had a place. Costa Rica served as my home base for a while. My partner is Costa Rican, so it makes sense for us to come and go.

MBS ([33:21](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([33:21](#)):

But I think that's really important, especially when I'm having a conversation about adult nomads who want to have careers and families and still incorporate more travel into their life. The idea of a home base is really, really important because we don't want to have to pick between life of travel and having that security and safety. I did a breakdown recently in a class I was giving, and actually for, the really Luke's adult nomad life with a home base and with at least three months of travel a year, you're looking at about \$120,000 in expenses.

MBS ([34:01](#)):

What is a home base? What constitutes that sense of home?



Ash ([34:09](#)):

It's the people.

MBS ([34:10](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([34:12](#)):

Don't you think? You've been in Toronto for a while.

MBS ([34:16](#)):

I have. I've been in Toronto for 21 years, and I've been away from Australia and Canberra, the city where I grew up, for 31 years, and I'm 55, so that's now well over half my life and most of my adult life that I've been away from where I grew up. But when I go back to Australia, it's partly the people. But the truth is, many of the people who I was friends with no longer live in Canberra. Canberra is a city people leave rather than often go back to. But I find something very resonant about the landscape, the feel of the sun, the smell of the eucalyptus trees, the dust, and how my parents' garden looks. I feel like there's a sort of, I don't know, Proustian landscaping thing around home, but I'm not entirely sure what it is that makes that so much a place of return for me.

Ash ([35:19](#)):

I think I want to rescind my answer because yours is much better. I feel that way weirdly in England, even though I have no ties to England. Something about the land.

MBS ([35:29](#)):

Right. It's interesting.

Ash ([35:32](#)):

Put me anywhere in England, and I'm like, "The grass."



MBS ([35:36](#)):

See, my wife is like that too. She's like, "England's really where I would choose to make a home." I don't want to live in England because I'm Australian. So we're naturally allergic to living in England, and it's all a bit gray and wet, but she responds to the history and the landscape there in a really powerful way.

Ash ([35:54](#)):

It is interesting how you feel connected to different places automatically. Naturally, I feel that way about England, the British Isles, Scotland, Ireland. I am 53% Irish, so maybe there's something there,-

MBS ([36:07](#)):

There we go.

Ash ([36:08](#)):

... but I feel that way. I do feel that way a bit in my hometown. I miss the trailer park. It was the county responsible for voting in Donald Trump, which I say with no love, but this atmosphere that actually has a lot of decay isn't really, I'm going to say, the nicest atmosphere.

MBS ([36:28](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([36:28](#)):

I have a weird sense of pull there. A lot of it, I think, is just memories,-

MBS ([36:36](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([36:36](#)):

... where you have memories feels really comforting.



MBS ([36:42](#)):

It's true. Actually, I got a question that shifts the conversation a little bit. When I was verbing through an introduction about you, I talked about how distinctive your voice is in your writing, and there's one question which I thought about but am not going to ask you, which is when did you first start noticing and cultivating that distinctive voice? But here's, I think, a trickier question. How do you not become a parody of yourself? And I'm asking because I have a distinctive voice in my writing as well, and sometimes I'm like, "Am I writing this or am I writing like I think Michael would be writing this?"

Ash ([37:30](#)):

Oh my God.

MBS ([37:31](#)):

I'm just wondering how you walk that line.

Ash ([37:34](#)):

I love this question. I don't think that a lot of people are that aware that it's a thing that totally happens.

MBS ([37:42](#)):

Right.

Ash ([37:43](#)):

That's how I started feeling about the Middle Finger Project.

MBS ([37:45](#)):

Right.

Ash ([37:45](#)):

The container itself was restricting the way I showed up inside of it.



MBS ([37:52](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([37:52](#)):

That's exactly it. It felt like I needed to really stay on brand with this persona that didn't feel like me anymore.

MBS ([37:58](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([37:59](#)):

I guess step one would be to burn it down.

MBS ([38:00](#)):

That's great.

Ash ([38:00](#)):

The furnace is on.

MBS ([38:00](#)):

"Burn down the barn so you can see the moon." As the famous poem goes.

Ash ([38:07](#)):

Oh, yes, I love that. Burn down everything. The other thing that I think has been helpful for me is writing on paper. I don't lie to myself on paper.

MBS ([38:20](#)):

That's powerful.

Ash ([38:22](#)):



I noticed. That's why I kept asking that question, what do I really want? And I will tell myself the truth.

MBS ([38:27](#)):

In your journal, Lost Writing.

Ash ([38:29](#)):

Yes. With a real pen. Especially because there's some level of permanence to what you're writing on paper.

MBS ([38:37](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([38:37](#)):

It's like, whatever I'm writing here must be true. So I think that's really helpful. The other thing that really has been a game changer for me over the years is just first thing in the morning, it has to be. I wake up at 5:00, I just sit down without anybody talking to me. That's when I find my real thoughts. Whatever's on my heart, my mind, it happens at those very early hours. I can't screw it up. I cannot look at my email, not one. My brain, it just starts turning faster than I would like it to with all the other things that are on the agenda.

MBS ([39:15](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([39:15](#)):

I need to just forget about the world.

MBS ([39:20](#)):

Yeah.



Ash ([39:21](#)):

Usually, that's when I end up, I'll put something in a notebook, and then I have to retype it because then I'm like, "This is all right. I think I'm put this on the internet."

MBS ([39:30](#)):

Nice. Ash, this has been a great conversation, and the reading was very powerful and really brought a topic that I feel I haven't helped you do justice to in asking you the questions. But I love that you brought it to us. As a final question perhaps, is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't yet been said between you and me?

Ash ([39:58](#)):

I would actually be curious how you avoid the parody in your writing. Have you had any strategies? I think it's such a great question.

MBS ([40:10](#)):

I have a proofreader, my wife, who has no fear about plunging a red pen repeatedly through my eye and my heart. That helps. She's good at pointing out where I'm falling into old tropes. Then I think I find this, if I can think about the structure of what I'm writing, the structure often allows me to then disrupt the voice, the metaphor, or whatever that I'm trying to use. Sometimes, when I'm writing books, I try and set some design parameters. This is strongly metaphorical. This is not metaphorical. These are stories about me. These are stories about geeky fact things that I like and I can use as metaphors. I'm trying to make some design choices at the start that help shape things as well.

Ash ([41:07](#)):



That's good.

MBS ([41:11](#)):

But I've got patterns of how I behave. I've got a tendency to try and be overly... Let me tell you a self-deprecating story about myself. Sometimes, I'm like, "That's actually just not that." I got feedback once from an editor who's like, "Is this book an autobiography or is it a business book?" I'm like, "It's meant to be a business book." She's like, "Why don't we cut all the stories about you that you're telling your way through?" And I'm like, "That's probably a good call."

Ash ([41:40](#)):

Through the heart, though.

MBS ([41:40](#)):

Through the heart.

Ash ([41:42](#)):

Through the heart.

MBS ([41:43](#)):

I know. But that's what others do. They help you see the stuff in your writing that you can't see yourself.

Ash ([41:51](#)):

It's so true. We had a conversation in a class recently where we just talked about this idea of throat clearing and how your first couple paragraphs are nonsense.

MBS ([42:05](#)):

Yeah.





Ash ([42:05](#)):

They're always going to be just like-

MBS ([42:05](#)):

First chapter. I work on this assumption. The first chapter is a load of trying to get you limbering up, and you can pretty much cut it because the first chapter is you trying to explain what you plan to say in the coming chapters, and you're like, "Why don't you just start at the second chapter?" So I'm like, "Yep, the first chapter's always rubbish."

Ash ([42:21](#)):

Isn't that the truth? It's like we have to go through this awful process.

MBS ([42:25](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([42:26](#)):

You're standing up on stage, and you're sitting there stuttering. That's what it feels like a lot.

MBS ([42:31](#)):

Yeah.

Ash ([42:32](#)):

I like the idea of putting the structure around it too. Sometimes when I'm writing, I will think to myself, "Okay, Ash, what's the point? What's the takeaway? What are you trying to get to here? Because are you getting there?"

MBS ([42:46](#)):

Have you vanished into the jungle?

([42:54](#)):



I love that Ash meditated on that hard, big, juicy question, "What do I really want?" I know you've heard that before. It's one of the questions from the coaching habit, and I think I say in the book that it's the hardest of all of those seven questions to answer, but how do you wrestle with it and actually get an answer you can trust? I don't know for sure. I'm still figuring this out myself. I just like some of the clues that Ash gave us. First, keep answering it. She journaled, and she journaled, and she journaled. The first answer is almost never the best answer. Second, she gave herself permission to be selfish. Not what do others want from me? Not what does society expect from me, but what do I really want? And finally, and I think this is really important, she took her best guess and tried it out because this isn't an answer you can just intellectualize and figure out. It's one you have to test by engaging with reality. You have to step forward into the unknown and say, "Let's see. Is this what I really, really want?"

[\(44:06\)](#):

Two interviews to compliment this beautifully. From the 2 Pages with MBS backlog, which is now getting substantial. Juliet Funt, a friend of mine, such a smart thinker, brilliant at living a life on the move. She travels quite a bit with her family, and this is her real super strength, creating space, white space, as she calls it, in her life so she can be doing the work that matters most and not be consumed by all the other stuff.

[\(44:36\)](#):

That interview is called The Powerful Pause, and then I'm going to mention Liz Wiseman, who I mentioned quite a lot as a recommended person. Actually, I'm doing a summit with Liz on June 3rd, along with my friend Tasha Eurich. I think if you're listening to this now, you'll have a chance to register for that. It's a free summit. We do 75 minutes of teaching together. Liz is such a masterful teacher, and really, she's fantastic. My conversation with her is called How to Thrive, but you'll find about the summit by just signing up to the newsletter because we'll be promoting that out through the newsletter at mbs.works. So if you're not



already on that, I'd encourage you to jump on [mbs.works](https://mbs.works), and you'll find a place to sign up for the newsletter for sure.

[\(45:23\)](#):

If you want more of Ash, and as I say, I'm a fan of her newsletter, [selfishforever.com](https://selfishforever.com) is the website, and [@ashambirge](#) on everything else. A-S-H-A-M-B-I-R-G-E. Watch for that surname. It's a little tricky. I keep misspelling it. I keep putting the R and the I in the wrong orders, but it's A-M-B-I-R-G-E. Thank you for loving the podcast. Thank you for reviewing it, starring it, passing it on, all of that good stuff. I appreciate you. I think you're awesome, and I think you're doing great.